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HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ROBERT MARSHALL ROOT (1863-1937)  
CENTENNIAL ART EXHIBIT

(1963)

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY







*Robert Marshall Root*

*1863-1937*



Robert Marshall Root  
CENTENNIAL ART EXHIBIT

June 16, 1963  
Chautauqua Auditorium  
Shelbyville, Illinois

Sponsored by  
SHELBY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
SHELBYVILLE CHAUTAUQUA ASSOCIATION

## Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to write this brief introduction to the catalog of the centennial exhibit of the paintings of Robert M. Root.

In Illinois we have fallen into the habit of thinking about our history in terms of men who were responsible for the great political events and government changes. Our strong interest in this kind of history is evidenced in the many publications about Abraham Lincoln, Stephen A. Douglas, the Civil War, the state's governors, and other political figures. What we sometimes forget is that history is the complete record of what people have done, and it is not confined to studies of political affairs. History should faithfully mirror all aspects of the lives and activities of all the people. Unfortunately, we too often neglect the history of agriculture, business, and social and cultural activities.

In this catalog we honor a man prominent in the cultural life of Illinois, Robert Marshall Root. In so doing, we are helping in a small way to close a gap in our over-all knowledge of the people of the state of Illinois.

The Shelby County Historical Society and the Shelbyville Chautauqua Association are to be congratulated for bringing together the art works of Shelbyville's own Robert M. Root for this exhibit. Root was an artist of considerable merit, and his work deserves more attention than it has so far received. This catalog will undoubtedly serve to bring him once again to the attention of the people who seriously study and enjoy the native art of Illinois.

*Clyde C. Walton,  
State Historian,  
Ill. State Historical Library*

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## The Life of Robert Root

as told by Beulah Gordon in 1934

Robert Marshall Root was born Mar. 20, 1863, the third and youngest son of John and Eunice Root. His birth occasioned no excitement. Shelbyville citizens were so engrossed in bitterly denouncing or hotly defending Abe Lincoln and the Republican Party, they scarcely took time to glance at the cromos on their walls. Had an angel appeared in their midst and prophesied to them that the child would some day become a great artist, it is quite probable their first question would have been concerning his politics.

The artist grew up in the midst of the hodge podge of his time: Poverty, wealth, culture, and ignorance. In an era of expansion, mud, saloons, and political rallies, he sought and found the beautiful. He drew pictures, thought thoughts, and dreamed dreams. And he became an artist because that was the only destiny he had been born to. He left the raw, colorful country town, and the crude prairies that were still making history, drinking whiskey, and raising Cain; and went to St. Louis and later Paris, France. Here he found beauty, sophistication, culture, and kindred spirits. He also found high honor, praise, and encouragement; but when his schooling was over he came home and stayed there. Shelbyville in its time has been large enough to hold a number of great men.

When Robert Root was a little boy he didn't know he wanted to be an artist. He didn't even know what an artist was. He had neither pencils or paper to draw with, but he used to scratch pictures on the fly leaves of books with red lead that he had gotten from packing around gaskets. When he was seven years old his parents moved to the country and here he lived until he was eleven. During that time he remembers seeing the smoke darkened sky caused by the Chicago fire, drawing "Trees full of jay birds," and going to watch the old mill owned by Hardin Barrett.

"The only literature we had to read in those days," Mr. Root said, "was The Saturday Night Magazine, and the New York Ledger. These came once a week and had serial stories in them by Mrs. Southworth and other English writers. They were the sort of tales that told about 'The sunlight Gently Tipping Her Hair,' and 'Her Alabaster Neck Floating gently Into the Room'. I read those stories and got ideas about life."



ROBERT ROOT AS A YOUNG MAN

So when he was eleven years old Robert Root moved back to town with things as he knew them dimly confused with the "crystal tears," and "tasteful elegance" of things as the then popular novels pictured them out. But deep within him was the consciousness that drawing trees full of jay birds was one of the most satisfying things he had ever done. Then when he was about twelve years old, he discovered art, and with that discovery his career began. The event took place when the boy one day saw a man making pencil drawings of a prominent house in Shelbyville. He watched the artist for a time, and then got himself a board, some pencils and paper and started to draw with him. The artist, if he may be so called, was L. A. Birk, and all who possess a copy of the 1880 edition of the History of Shelby and Moultrie Counties, may view therein his pictures of farm homes and city dwellings, stiff with precision and rigid as cast iron ornaments.

Now that he had found an outlet, Robert Root soon became quite adept at drawing pictures of this sort. Birk was so impressed with his work he wished to take the boy with him. Robert stayed, however, and made quite a little spending money for himself by drawing pictures of the various houses in town and selling them for a dollar each. He attended Main Street School until he was fourteen. Then his father died and he was forced to quit. He went to work for Arthur Launey and George Sitler, photographers. Here he did retouching, learned photography, and was initiated into the now lost art of making crayon portraits. Later he went to Springfield with Sitler and stayed for a year and a half, from there he went to Decatur, and after remaining a year and a half in that city, returned home. All this time he had been drawing on the side. One day Horace Taylor, a famous cartoonist on a Chicago paper who had studied at the U. of I. with Lorado Taft, came to Shelbyville on an assignment and saw young Roots work. He was quite impressed by its quality and advised the young artist to go to New York to night school and work days to pay his way through. Root was only eighteen years old at the time, he didn't have much money, and New York was a long way off: but he took Taylor's advice and went. When he reached his destination he succeeded in getting a job doing retouching work up and down the Bowery. After that he entered the Cooper Union Art School, held in the old Cooper Union Hall, where Lincoln made his famous Cooper Union Speech in 1860. Here he was set at drawing ornamental designs and told that in two or three years he could start drawing from life. That wasn't what he wanted and after six weeks of it he came home. Here he entered the photographer's gallery again and started saving his money. He wanted to study art and he wanted to draw from life. When he felt he had saved enough money to warrant another venture to fulfill these ambitions, he left for St. Louis, and entered the Fine Arts School of Washington University. It was here he formed a lifelong friendship with a fellow student



"Seein' Things", one of the few humorous paintings by Robert Root. Local boys were used as models for the figures around the campfire. The painting originally hung in the high school and at present is in the Main Street school.



Typical of the many landscapes created by Mr. Root, this painting was presented to the Shelbyville High School by the Class of 1910.

E. H. Wuerpel, who became head of the art school. After entering the school, Root was placed in a class drawing from casts and told, as he had been in New York, that it would be two or three years before he could start drawing from life. But after working two or three weeks his genius was recognized and he was promoted to the advanced life classes. His rise after that was swift. With the help of teachers he secured enough scholarships to carry him through and after three years he graduated with all the honors possible for the University to bestow. He received the Layman Crow medal, the highest honor a student of the Art School could attain, and six diplomas. During his years in St. Louis art was not the only thing he distinguished himself in, for as a sort of side line to his art he also carried off the "Student Life" prize given by the *Globe-Democrat* for the best article published in that periodical.

#### STUDIES IN PARIS, FRANCE.

After his graduation he came back to Shelbyville and stayed for a short time, then he departed for Paris, France where he remained for two years. There he rented a studio in company with Paul Conoyer, his old friend Wuerpel and others, and attended the renowned Academy Julien. Among the young artists of that day the boy from Shelbyville stood high. The first year one of his paintings, "Girl With Roses," was hung in the famous Paris Salon. After attaining this feat, so remarkable for a student, he further distinguished himself when the famous art connoisseur, Rodman Wanamaker, commissioned him to copy several masterpieces for him. These and other honors gave young Root a high standing among his classmates. It was a far cry from the old days in the photographer's gallery at Shelbyville.

#### Heard First Wagner Opera in Paris.

While in Paris Mr. Root heard the first Wagner Opera ever given in that city. The first night the troupe of German actors were scheduled to present the opera of their distinguished fellow countryman, a howling mob surrounded the Opera House and threatened to tear the hated Germans limb for limb should they attempt to enter. The next night the French cavalry formed a square about the Opera House and standing horse to horse, and with drawn sabers, refused to let any save those showing tickets enter. In spite of the feeling against the Germans the opera was a great success that night, and in less than six weeks all Paris was crazy over Wagner.

The Paris of those days was much the same that DeMaurier has written about. Mr. Root recalls a student demonstration in which thousands of students came trotting into Paris on foot from the Paris Salon on the outskirts of the city, with the red-headed model Sarah Brown said to have been the inspiration of "Trilby" heading the procession in a wheelbarrow.

Those were the days when Sarah Bernhardt began her series of farewell tours to America. Mr. Root recalled with amusement how on one of these visits the divine Sarah visited the Chicago stockyards and on being shown through the slaughter pens where the cattle were butchered threw up her hands in horror and exclaimed, "Alas! Alas! I can no longer now la bif' steak eat!"

After two years in the city that Mr. Root describes as "bright and beautiful," he returned home. Previous to his departure a representative of Tiffany's in New York had asked him to come and work for that concern to design stained glass windows. But after he returned to New York the artist was seized with an illness and after recovering from it he wanted to come home to Shelbyville. Besides a year spent working in St. Louis and trips taken to various parts of the country, he has been here ever since. In the same building he once worked as a photographer's helper, he now had the studio of a celebrity.

### HISTORICAL PICTURES

Robert Root's famous pictures hardly need commenting on. Everyone knows about his painting of the Lincoln-Douglas debate held at Charleston, that now has a place of honor in the state capital. This picture was painted to celebrate the Illinois Centennial in 1818, and was shown at the State Fair of that year. There it created such a sensation that the State Legislature bought it for the sum of \$1,500, and honored the artist by presenting him with a special Centennial medal. The picture was given a prominent place in the state house, and later Governor Emmerson caused it to be specially lighted so it might be more easily seen. Mr. Root's other famous Lincoln painting, the Lincoln-Thornton debate, hangs in the local high school. Ten years of work were spent on the picture. Both historical pictures were painted with infinite care as to accuracy and detail. All the faces are of men who actually attended the debates, and were painted from old tintypes, ambrotypes, and daguerrotypes. The settings are drawn as accurately as is humanly possible. For the Lincoln-Douglas debate the artist visited fair grounds at Charleston where it was held, and for the Lincoln-Thornton debate, he got actual measurements of the old court house. One instance illustrating the fidelity of detail in his picture is the glimpse shown through the court house window of the old Thornton Bank that stood where the Catholic church is now. Critics have declared that the artist's portraits of Lincoln as shown in these pictures are the best that have ever been painted. Needless to say, in order to create these works of art, Mr. Root was obliged to do much historical research and careful reading.



One of his last works, but one which became one of his most famous. Mr. Root created this Air Mail poster in 1936. It was displayed at all of the state postmasters' conventions and at the National Postmasters' Convention in San Francisco.

A year after the poster was completed Mr. Root died. Among the many messages of sympathy was one from Jesse M. Donaldson, who was at that time deputy first assistant Postmaster General. In a letter to Shelbyville Postmaster James Shoaff, Mr. Donaldson said: "I appreciate very much the copy of the Shelbyville Union which carried an article concerning the death of our good friend, Robert Root.

"I have known Mr. Root for a number of years and always admired him for his integrity, his simplicity and his great love of nature. I regret very much that it was not possible for us to do something to recognize him for his painting of the Air Mail poster, but of course there was no authority of law, and all we could do was to tell him how much we appreciate it."

Mr. Donaldson, who was one of the first mail carriers in Shelbyville, later became Postmaster General of the United States.

Mr. Root ranked his pictures of Samuel S. Moulton, Judge Anthony Thornton, Dr. Livingston C. Lord of Charleston Teacher's College, and Barrett O'Hara, former lieutenant-governor whose picture hangs in the state house at Springfield—as among his best portraits. During the years many portraits and landscapes came from his brush, numbers of which won honors at various exhibits including those at Chicago, Boston, New York, St. Louis, and Louisiana. To name only a few of his many excellent pictures, there are: The portrait of Chief Justice Farmer; the murals of the Attorney General's office at Springfield; the portrait of Judge Johns at Decatur; the miniature of Agnes Mertens, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. H. J. Hamlin; the portrait of George B. Wendling, Jr., hung in the office of the Standard Life Insurance Company at St. Louis; the portraits of five prominent Decatur men including O. B. Gorin and A. E. Staley, that hang in the beautiful Masonic Temple there; and the portrait of Norman Foster. The list grows slightly tedious, and there are many people not interested in portraits who knew Robert Root for his landscapes that catch and hold much of the charm of the middle-west, a section that distant critics are fond of calling dull and uninteresting. Aside from his portraits, Mr. Root ranked high as an interpreter of the beauty of the corn country. The familiar, homey beauty we too often fail to appreciate. A visit to the artist's studio always brought a keener awareness of the loveliness that we so often pass by and not through.

Excessive praise of Robert Root is superfluous. One does not assure a celebrity he has worth. That is for promising amateurs. Suffice it is to say that Robert Root ranked very high in his profession, and loved art as much as he hated eulogies. It might be said in passing, that in later years Mr. Root took up etching with considerable success.

Fully in accord with many of the tenets of modern art, he did not approve of the modernistic school. Soulful artists of detached eyes, cubes, triangles, street lamps, and coal buckets, arranged in a symbolic jumble he regarded as, "A lot of would-be painters who are trying to paint pictures without training, and who want to begin where the masters left off." He put the modernistic work in the same class with jazz music. "There is no royal road that leads to art," he declared. "You can't take a short cut and learn to paint without training."



Mr. Root at work on one of his many portraits.



Mr. Root as he appeared in his later years. Never given to stylish dress he is probably remembered by most people as he appears here wearing the customary corduroy trousers and frayed coat.



Charles L. Heinz was born in Shelbyville on January 8, 1885. During his early years he became acquainted with Robert Root and the two became close friends. Mr. Root helped Charles Heinz in his art work and encouraged him in it. Mr. Heinz studied in the eastern part of the United States and became quite famous for his paintings. He died on January 1, 1953.



JUDGE SAMUEL W. MOULTON



JUDGE ANTHONY THORNTON

## THE THORNTON AND MOULTON PORTRAITS

by Mr. Bob

Near the top of the list of former Shelbyville residents who gained some degree of fame during their lifetime, and whose names have lived on through the years, are those of Judge Anthony Thornton and Judge Samuel W. Moulton.

Robert Root painted the portraits of these two gentlemen some sixty-five years ago. These are numbered among his most famous portraits. (The pictures shown here are from original souvenir pictures distributed at the dedication and unveiling ceremonies.)

It was on a Friday afternoon, June 10, 1898, when ceremonies for the unveiling of these life-size portraits were held. More than 500 invitations were sent out. The court room was packed that warm, stormy afternoon and many stood throughout the entire proceedings.

Judge Samuel L. Dwight was on the bench and opened the court in due form. Another prominent local lawyer, George D. Chaffee, was chairman of the committee on arrangements and was master of ceremonies for the occasion.

This excerpt from his remarks indicates the esteem held for the Messrs. Thornton and Moulton:

"Today our dear friends are with us. We hear their voices, we see their faces, we feel the warm grasp of their friendly hands. Following no custom we have had an artist paint them as we know them. We have secured the shadow 'ere the substance fades. We have these pictures upon the walls as you see them now as a well deserved tribute to their long and faithful services and as a help and inspiration to others who shall follow."

The two revered gentlemen were getting up in years when this honor was bestowed upon them. At that time Judge Moulton was 77 years old and Judge Thornton was 84. Neither survived for many years after their big day in 1898—Judge Moulton died seven years later and Judge Thornton lived only six more years. But their names and deeds were not forgotten. Thanks to the genius of Robert Root we have their splendid portraits today.

LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE BY ROBERT ROOT



## THE LINCOLN-DOUGLAS DEBATE

by Mr. Bob

The Robert Root painting of the fourth Lincoln-Douglas debate is probably his most famous, historically speaking. Thousands of visitors to the Illinois State House have viewed the painting and marvelled at the realism of the scene captured on canvas. The painting hangs in the north corridor on the second floor of the State House.

The painting was planned to help celebrate the Illinois Centennial in 1918. It was shown at the State Fair that year and created such a sensation that the State Legislature bought it for \$1,500 and honored the artist by presenting him with a special Centennial medal.

Realism is the keynote to this painting. It had long been the ambition of Mr. Root to depict one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Shortly before the turn of the century, Mr. Root did a portrait from life settings at Charleston of Mrs. Harriet Chapman, daughter of Dennis Hanks, the only survivor at that time of the famous journey of the Lincoln family from Spencer County, Indiana, to Decatur, Illinois, in 1830. Mrs. Chapman at that time was a little girl of seven years and the youngest member of the party.

Mrs. Chapman and her son, Robert, entertained Mr. Root with many an intimate recollection of the Lincoln family. They showed him many rare prints from the original negatives of the Lincoln and Hanks families.

The central figures in the painting are, of course, Abraham Lincoln and Stephen A. Douglas. Sitting on the platform, from left to right, are: O. B. Ficklin, Dr. Chambers, Stephen A. Douglas, Horace White, Robert R. Hitt, Mr. Lincoln, Henry Binmore, James T. Cunningham, James B. Sheridan, Usher F. Linder, H. P. H. Bromwell, Elisha Linder and Richard J. Oglesby.

All of these men are mentioned prominently in the state volumes of history as being closely identified with this great event.

Mr. Root spared no pains in collecting old portraits from historical sources and relatives. These included pictures of Robert R. Hitt and Horace White who were employed by Mr. Lincoln to report the series of seven debates. They represented the Chicago Press Tribune. James B. Sheridan and Henry Binmore were similarly employed by Mr. Douglas, representing the Chicago Times.

Mr. Root made studies at the actual site of the debate and the resulting painting is as historically correct as possible. He endeavored to reproduce the local color and to give a presentation of the crude though virile setting in this contest of two men so evenly matched in polemical power yet so unlike in temperament and in physical appearance.

In this endeavor he succeeded in capturing history for the eyes of many succeeding generations.

## THE LINCOLN-THORNTON DEBATE

by Mr. Bob

It was not until about 1903 that any particular effort was made to rescue from oblivion Shelbyville's historical footnote, the Lincoln-Thornton debate of 1856. It was at that time that Robert Marshall Root conceived the idea of painting the big picture of the debate scene.

By that time there were few living persons who were present at the debate or who had recollections of it. Perhaps the only publication locally containing any considerable mention of the debate was a history of Shelby County in which the Thornton autobiographical notes appeared.

Despite the handicap of meager information, the artist valiantly plunged into the task of preserving on canvas the events of that summer day of 1856.

He was well-fitted for this undertaking for he was born in Shelbyville only seven years after the day of the debate, although he never heard of it until about 1900, and grew to manhood with many of the participants as his daily companions. Anthony Thornton was his close friend. Men with whom he had long associations in boyhood and in later mature years had been in the audience and from them he gathered information and, eventually, encouragement.

From Judge Thornton, Judge Moulton, Rev. Donthit and others he obtained a general idea of the grouping of the figures. "I went to Judge Thornton first when I undertook the work and he agreed to help me all he could. From him I learned about the judge's bench, the jury box, railing, chairs, brick floor, windows and general grouping in the courthouse. His recollections were very clear." (*From an interview with Mr. Root, May 8, 1917.*)

Next he gathered available pictures, mostly faded photographs, of the attendants. From old settlers and their descendants he received a list of prominent persons who attended the debate. Of the sixty figures which form the group, fifty-three actual portraits are distinguishable.



LINCOLN-THORNTON DEBATE BY ROBERT ROOT

The Alexander Hesler photograph of Lincoln, taken in Chicago about 1860, was used as a model. For Thornton he used a full-length photograph of a group of Congressmen taken in Washington, D.C., in 1863.

Robert Root's research is about the only evidence we have today of the authenticity of details of the debate. Search for the letter sent to Lincoln inviting him to speak in Shelbyville was fruitless. We know that Lincoln received many such invitations as a result of a speech made in Bloomington on May 29, 1856, for the State Republican Convention. This became known as the celebrated "Lost Speech."

In Herndon's "The Life of Lincoln" this appears: "Lincoln, having as usual been named as one of the presidential electors, canvassed the state making in all about fifty speeches. He was in demand everywhere. I have before me a package of letters addressed to him, inviting him to speak at almost every county seat in the state."

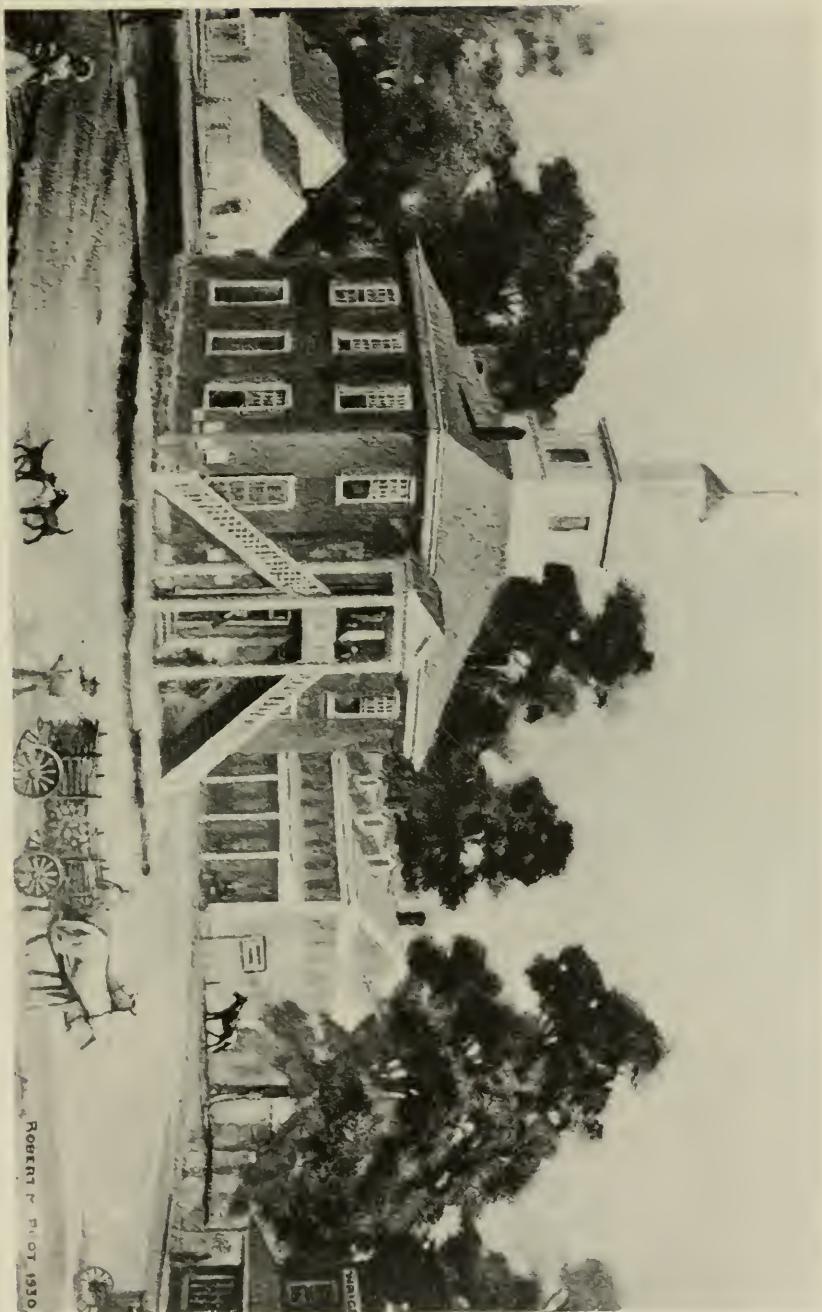
In 1895 a historical writer visited Anthony Thornton for an interview. This is from the notes of that interview: "In June, 1856, after having been a Whig all my life, I joined the Democratic party. Lincoln and I held a debate in Shelbyville. I gave him the courtesy of the opening speech, but he consumed three hours and tired the crowd out for me."

Judge Thornton gave this brief account of the affair in his autobiography written in 1896:

"In June, 1856, I made an appointment to pronounce my first Democratic speech in the old courthouse in Shelbyville. There were only a few Republicans in Shelby County at that time. Slavery, and intimately connected with it the Nebraska Bill, was the principal question for discussion. A committee waited on me and requested a joint discussion, to which I assented.

"On the appointed day Mr. Lincoln appeared. I had known him well for many years. As it was my meeting and as a matter of courtesy, I consented that Mr. Lincoln should open the discussion. He commenced at two o'clock and spoke until nearly five. He knew he was addressing people who sympathized with the South and he made a most ingenious and plausible speech. He, however, spoke so very long that I became apprehensive as to any effort I might make to a wearied crowd. I began my reply by telling one of Mr. Lincoln's stories and thus obtained the attention of the crowd and made a short speech."

Judge Moulton's short description was less kind: "Debate? That wasn't any debate. Lincoln made a speech."



Old Shelbyville court house where the Lincoln-Thornton debate was held in 1856 (a painting by Robert Root)

Although the date of June 15, 1856, has been accepted as the true date of the debate for many years, recent findings cast some doubt as to the authenticity of this date. The Illinois State Historical Society has recently found an account of a debate held in Shelbyville on August 9, 1856. Is it possible that the June 15 date is erroneous? It seems so when this evidence is considered:

From the Illinois State Register (Springfield newspaper) dated August 19, 1856: 'On Saturday, the 9th, the democraey had a great gathering in Shelbyville. Hon. A. Lincoln was present. The meeting was opened by a speech of about an hour and a half by S. W. Moulton. Mr. M. took strong ground for the democracy and exposed the hypocrisy and knavery of the black republicans. He made many strong points and called upon Lincoln to answer them.'

"Lincoln then took the stand and made a three hours speech. It was prosy and dull in the extreme—all about freedom', 'liberty' and niggers. He answered nothing that had been said by Mr. Moulton and dodged every issue in the present canvass and attempted to make small side issues of no importance. He ridiculed the idea of disunion and used a great many sophisms to divert the public mind from the true issue of the day.

"He was replied to by Mr. A. Thornton in a very effectual manner. His dodging of the true issue was exposed and all the points made by Lincoln were effectually answered and the true issue presented in an able manner. Mr. T. made a very able speech.

"Our people were disappointed in Lincoln, but attributed his short comings to the want of merit in his cause. Old Shelby is good for 1,000 democratic majority over all the isms."

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## THE COVER

The bust of Robert Root was created in 1892 by Boston's famous sculptor, Bela L. Pratt. At that time the two were classmates in Paris. Mr. Pratt's notable works include the Spanish War Memorial at Harvard and the statue of Nathan Hale at Yale.

## THE ARTIST DIES

When Robert Root died in his room at the Neal Hotel on August 21, 1937 the city of Shelbyville was plunged into mourning. Suddenly the people realized that something had gone out of the life of the town that could never be replaced.

One newspaper summed up the feelings of the town as it reported the funeral services quoting the "man on the street" as saying collectively, "Well, they buried Bob Root this afternoon - Shelbyville's lost something."

Probably the highest tribute came from Governor Henry Horner who attended the funeral. The governor sent this telegram to John Root

"The unexpected death of your illustrious brother, Robert Root, saddens me and I hasten to express my sincere sympathy to you and the other members of your family. For more than fifty years his name has stood high among Illinois and American artists. His death leaves a place in the art world not soon to be filled except by the fine contributions left in his many famous paintings and etchings. We hail the work of this master and mourn his going. His memory and his masterpieces will linger long with us."

Since this is a memorial booklet designed to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of Robert Root, it seems appropriate that we close these pages with the text of the funeral sermon delivered by the Rev. Raymond McCallister in memory of Mr. Root:

"In the midst of life, we are in death!" — this old adage comes with convincing force as we gather about the bier of our beloved and renowned fellow citizen, Robert Marshall Root, to pay our last deed of respect on this sad and solemn occasion.

Some four weeks ago I said good-bye to our friend in his studio where I went to visit before leaving on vacation. He was in fair health and excellent spirit. Then as he pointed out a portrait upon which he was putting some finishing touches, I stood for two or three minutes in absolute silence gazing upon one of his masterpieces, for I had known his subject well. The portrait had been touched by a genius, anyone could know that. I hardly recall what I said to Mr. Root when at last I spoke to him about the work; suffice it is to say he accepted my congratulations with a thankful smile, for he was humbly appreciative - it was so characteristic of him.

Four weeks ago it was good-bye, today it is another good-bye. The life that was within is now departed to a greater fulfillment. It is most difficult to believe that he no longer abides with us, or does he? It seems almost tragic that his passing should come even at the advanced age of practically three quarters of a century. It seemed that he was still at the zenith of his power and ability. He turned so quietly from his studio two days before yesterday and slipped away a few hours later as though he had planned it that way to cause his friends the least possible pain at his going.

There is an old saying: "If you would have a friend, be one." I have often thought that the secret at the basis of Mr. Root's life, for his disposition was to extend acts of kindness and friendship rather than receive them. To some who knew him only casually, he seemed aloof; but that was only an expression of his innate desire to remain constantly in the background. Always he was reserved and retiring, the sure signs of a truly great soul. One would always have to lead him out in conversation to get him to speak of his splendid accomplishments, then he would do it only meagerly.

He was the most companionable of men to those whom he knew - possessed with a sound mind, I should say a thinker in his own right, widely read and a sane commentator on affairs of interest. He was a man of great loyalties without which no man can be truly successful.

First of all, his love for, and devotion to his chosen work - art as represented by painting. I have never known a man more devoted to it. It was a part of his very being. Mr. Root was never satisfied with mediocre service in his chosen field, for he wanted to make the most of his opportunities in the development and promotion of the esthetic in life. It is no extravagant statement to say that he literally gave his life in the work so dear to his heart.

Will you bear with me for another moment while I say to you that I was not long acquainted with Robert Root until I discovered his philosophy of religion? He preached it in his pictures as strongly as we ministers from the pulpit. He never temporized with the truth, nor compromised a principle. He was genuine. If he believed a thing to be right, he did not hesitate to uphold it; and if it was wrong he as fearlessly condemned it. He recognized that we are living in a world of change, in art, it would seem as in everything else; but he deplored the artists who modernistically "daubed" and called it painting. Robert Root stood four-square with John Grier Hibben in his statement that everything changes but certain fundamental laws of right and justice - that there is something immutable about this, because they are eternal. There is nothing in these principles that denies progress its place in the sun, but rather makes way for it.

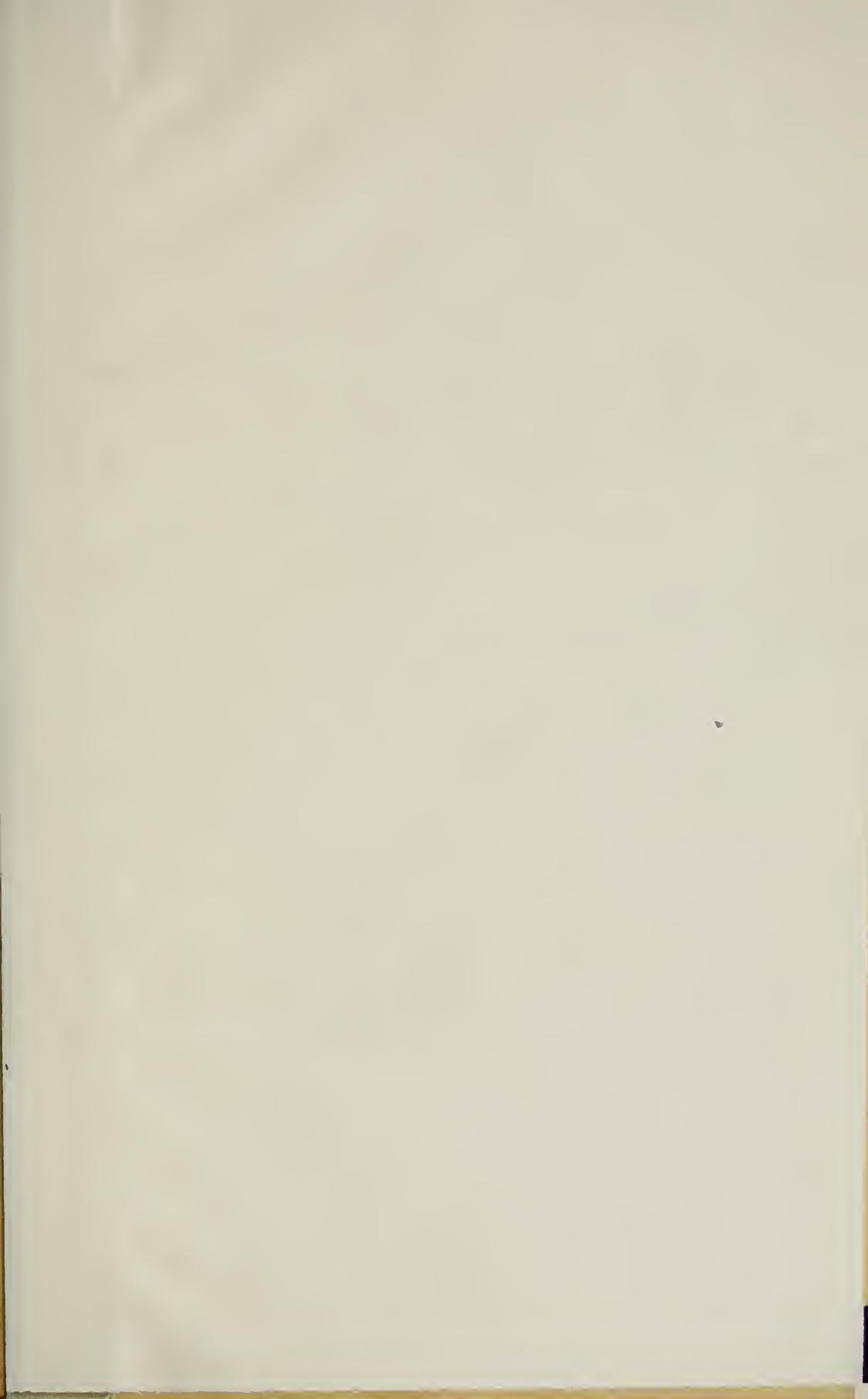
This can be said of him - despite that fact that he was a man of deep convictions he was most tolerant, charitably disposed towards those who disagreed with his views.

I have spent most of this time in eulogy. He of all men would say he did not deserve it. But most of us who knew and loved him would disagree. He merits more praise than my poor tongue can describe. Shelbyville has been richly blest and honored by his presence, and while we think we deeply appreciate him now, only the passing of years will portray his real worth.

The Master Painter of Life has beckoned Robert Root to a "sitting." His going has left us with a vacant spot against the sky.









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